Organizing to Organize: The Case of a Successful Long-Haul Campaign for Collective Bargaining Rights

Kevin M. Kniffin

Abstract
After nearly four decades of campaigning, faculty and academic staff union members across the University of Wisconsin system won the right to bargain collectively in June 2009 when the governor signed legislation that modified state labor law. In this article, the author presents historical and interdisciplinary analyses of the organizational structures that were critical to the campaign’s success. While the case study should be interesting for academics across disciplines, the Wisconsin experience carries generalizable lessons for union organizing in any sector of the economy. In addition to cataloging the tens of legislative attempts that faculty and academic staff unionists undertook to win collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, the article juxtaposes the legislative goals with environmental variables, such as which political party controlled state government and how many faculty and academic staff were committed to the campaign at any given time as regular dues-paying members. It is clear in this light that persistence paid dividends for the campaign and that leverage created by the local unions in relation to their state and national affiliates was necessary for the campaign’s longevity and success. Against this backdrop, the author also considers the degree to which tensions between a local union and its larger affiliates might variably affect organizing across different international unions. The case study has relevance for discussions of minority or nonmajority unions as well as strategic decisions about how unions pursue level playing fields for organizing new members.

Keywords
open source unions, minority unions, nonmajority unions, collective bargaining rights, neutrality agreements, labor law, faculty unions, higher education

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State labor laws became regular topics of national debate in early 2011, after legislative proposals to eliminate or erode long-established bargaining rights in several midwestern states elicited widespread union mobilizations. In the case of Wisconsin, the state’s rich history of union organizing contrasted sharply with the newly elected governor’s proposal and—undoubtedly—played a supporting role in the mass actions that became common national news stories (e.g., Ryan, 2011). While labor regulations in other states—for example, Colorado (Meachem and Scully 2009), Indiana (Dvorak 2010), and New Mexico (Lindy 2011)—have been the subject of significant change at various points over the past 10 years, the national focus on state laws for public-sector collective bargaining in early 2011 was new and atypical (e.g., Riccucci 2011).

In contrast with the attention that Wisconsin legislators and unionists generated in early 2011, it has been more common—understandably—for federal labor law to be the main topic of any national debates concerning union-related legislation. Indeed, since federal legislation establishes the ground rules for labor-management relations for the full scope of the United States’ private sector, it is clear that the stakes are higher when compared with any particular state law, whose jurisdiction is limited to a subset of public-sector employees. In fact, the high stakes that have been placed on this subject presumably helps to account for the failure of Labor or Management to win significant legislative changes subsequent to 1947’s adoption of the Taft-Hartley Act (Freeman and Rogers 2006, 185) even if nonlegislative rulings from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and courts have significantly eroded private-sector union rights in recent decades (e.g., Metchick and Singh, 2004).

The stakes for making change to state labor laws are typically much lower since each of the fifty states has its own jurisdiction for public-sector labor relations. The stakes for public-sector laws in each state have also tended to be lower because fewer people are affected and because the employers (i.e., governmental units) do not have the same pressures to earn profits as for-profit firms. One policy benefit of these differences is that states are able to serve as “laboratories” (Brandeis 1932) for experiments or innovations that people in charge of federal labor laws are unwilling or unable to test. In the case of Wisconsin’s experiences in early 2011, the stakes were heightened as a result of the national attention; however, both proponents and opponents of the governor’s proposal to erode collective bargaining rights presumed that Wisconsin’s legislature and governor were establishing a new “test” pattern that would influence actions in other states (e.g., Ohio). In this sense, the states-as-laboratories metaphor was commonly accepted by people on both sides of the conflict.

The difference in speed with which several midwestern states acted to amend their public-sector labor laws in early 2011 could not be much greater when contrasted with actions to change comparable federal frameworks. As the most recent attempt to amend federal labor law, the Employee Free Choice Act illustrates the challenges that advocates for national legislation can face even in cases where many of the Act’s important provisions have already been adopted by several states (e.g., Bruno 2009). The Act also demonstrates, however, the fact that people do place varying degrees of “stakes” on winning changes to the law. For example, while advocates for workplace
rights agree that the Act would address some of the weaknesses of current labor regulations (e.g., Bronfenbrenner 2009; Friedman 2007; Martinez Ortega 2007), some have raised concerns that the Act might not serve all of the purposes that are necessary to create a level playing field for workers to organize and gain fair treatment (e.g., Adams 2007; Nissen 2009). In fact, this concern about the exaggeration of legislative impact—at the federal or state level—is similar to the conclusion that Bronfenbrenner and Juravich (1995) reached in their review of public sector organizing campaigns when they acknowledged that “it is not simply passage and adoption of comprehensive collective bargaining legislation that creates a receptive climate for organizing.” Instead, Bronfenbrenner and Juravich are clear that the relationship between laws and political strength is a two-way street when they specify that “the social and political climate necessary to get such legislation passed, in and of itself, creates an environment more conducive to organizing” (p. 122).

The same unionist views that question the potential benefits of the Employee Free Choice Act would seem to be complemented by those who question the potential harm that can be caused by legislation that erodes traditional collective bargaining rights. For example, criticisms of the “service model” of unions often celebrate the engagement that can be created when stewards communicate with members each month in part to hand-collect dues contributions rather than rely on employer check-off systems (e.g., Buss 2002; Cohen 2011). A common feature of these arguments—from unionists who express hesitations about the Employee Free Choice Act to those who suggest that growth can still occur against the grain of hostile laws—is that legislation should not dictate worker action. In the affirmative, these analyses recommend that organizing should happen independently of any legislative frameworks and that “the law will follow”—and eventually reflect—any new balances of power that organizing can create.

In this article, I explore a number of topics related to organizing and labor laws by highlighting the case of a successful long-haul campaign by faculty and academic staff unionists employed by the University of Wisconsin (UW) system to win legislation that would enable collective bargaining. While the campaign focused on winning a change to state labor law, there are generalizable lessons concerning the way in which the union sustained its efforts and maintained its energy for approximately four decades. Beyond reviewing the chronology of legislative efforts since 1971, I focus on implications of the case study for (1) debates concerning the value of “open source,” “minority,” or “nonmajority” unions (e.g., Freeman and Rogers 2002; Nissen 2001; Summers 1990) in which officially sanctioned collective bargaining is not necessarily practiced and (2) strategic consideration of the processes through which unions pursue neutrality agreements for organizing new bargaining units (e.g., Eaton and Kriesky 2001, 2009; Eaton and Rubenstein 2006; Hurd 2008; Lund and Wright 2003; Mills 2001; Stewart 2006). The case study concludes its descriptive analysis of the campaign with the adoption of bargaining rights for UW System faculty and academic staff in June 2009; however, the findings have timely relevance for organizing in states where newly elected legislators are eroding union rights. Likewise, the case highlights a decades-long campaign whose generalizable lessons might otherwise be eclipsed in
national debates because of legislative actions in early 2011 to radically change the state’s labor laws.

An Overview of the Wisconsin Campaign

With a history that includes figures such as “Fighting Bob” La Follette (Unger 2008) along with policy innovations such as unemployment insurance and workers’ compensation (Holter 1999, 3), Wisconsin has often been recognized as “a Progressive showcase for social legislation” (Gilbert 2000, 167). With specific regard to its approach to labor relations, Wisconsin is broadly considered to have led the founding of industrial relations in the United States (Kaufman 2003) as well as the development of state labor laws. Schneider (1988, 196), for example, celebrates “Wisconsin’s pioneering law” that was adopted in 1962 to create a labor board for the state’s public sector that was empowered to administer representation elections for municipal employees and to otherwise resolve labor-management impasses. Similarly, Saltzman (1986) catalogs various attempts to advance public-sector bargaining rights in Wisconsin from as far back as the 1930s, while Wollett, Grodin, and Weisberger (1993) establish on page 1 of their textbook that the Badger State had “the only state statute of significance covering public sector employees” in 1962. More recently, Grodin, Weisberger, and Malin (2004, 81) report that “Wisconsin is usually given credit . . . for being the first jurisdiction to enact legislation granting organizational, representation, and bargaining rights to municipal employees.” In fact, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was founded by a group of Wisconsin state employees in 1932 (e.g., Lavigna 2002).

Against this backdrop and subsequent extensions of Wisconsin’s public sector laws, it is not surprising that people who work for the state’s agencies as accountants, forensic scientists, engineers, and attorneys, to name a few professions, chose to form unions that have the right and responsibility of bargaining collectively. Similarly, graduate employees at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee have successfully negotiated collective bargaining agreements (e.g., Czitrom 2010), just as faculty who work as part of the state’s two-year technical college campuses have been bargaining collectively since the 1960s (Villa and Blum 1996).

In contrast with these groups but consistent with Lund, DeClercq, and Childers’ (2008) observation that “comprehensive” public-sector bargaining frameworks do not necessarily provide rights to all public-sector employees, the largest set of employees in the state who lacked collective bargaining rights—until June 2009—was the population of approximately eighteen thousand faculty and academic staff employed by the UW System’s fifteen institutions. In the sections that follow, I will catalog the tens of efforts by the union to win legislative change by drawing on a review of legislative records starting in 1971. The history of those legislative efforts will be complemented, however, by a review of publications and related correspondence maintained by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the university’s administration, and the state historical archives. Finally, the review will draw partly on interviews and observations
gleaned through my experiences as field staff assigned to the campaign by AFT’s state federation starting in 2002. On the basis of these experiences, which included direct communications with representatives of (potential) rivals to AFT, my review is able to account for the macro- and microscale aspects of the campaign. While the case study follows a model of rich ethnographic detail (e.g., Albright 2008; Gabriel 2008; Kamper 2006), the article concludes with interdisciplinary analyses of interorganizational relationships (e.g., Durrenberger 2007) to highlight lessons that might be generalized to other environments.

To help readers keep track, Table 1 catalogs the long list of legislative attempts, starting in 1971, that would have extended collective bargaining rights to faculty and academic staff employed by the UW System. Table 1 also identifies which political party controlled the governor’s office, state senate, and state assembly across the time period according to biennial election cycles. Likewise, for years where the data were available, the table specifies the number of faculty and academic staff union members, the number of faculty and academic staff unionists elected to state federation leadership roles, the number of field staff assigned to the campaign for bargaining rights, and the status of positions held by student organizations, by competing labor organizations, and by the faculty senate at UW-Madison. Throughout this article, I will elaborate on the nature and importance of these variables and will present the legislative history according to decade, since the union’s strategic shifts tend to correspond with the ten-year windows.

To introduce readers to people and positions who were most closely connected to the campaign, Table 2 catalogs the demography of faculty and academic staff from 1978-79 through 2007-8. It is notable—because of its idiosyncrasy as well as its implications for organizing—that Wisconsin’s state law defines faculty exclusively as tenured or tenure-eligible professors, while “academic staff” is left as a miscellaneous unclassified category that, up until June 2009, the administration typically treated as contingent, at-will employees with no collective bargaining rights. A scan of Table 2 shows that the number of tenure-track faculty decreased by 9.6 percent during the period, while administrative sources (UW System Administration 2010) indicate that student enrollment has increased by 17.9 percent during the same period (from 148,496 to 175,056). While larger class sizes likely explain part of the way that the university has taught more students with fewer faculty, the primary explanation is that non-tenure-track faculty positions have increased tremendously in the same time period. More specifically, while Table 2’s account of academic staff includes people who work as researchers, counselors, coaches, and admissions officers—to name a subset of the positions—there were at least 4,304 non-tenure-track faculty employed during the 2009-10 academic year in addition to 6,372 graduate assistants, many of whom have teaching responsibilities (UW System Administration 2010).

While staffing trends within higher education institutions constitute an important topic in its own right, it is noteworthy in relation to the union’s campaign for collective bargaining rights that academic staff tended to emerge as leaders on the campuses where they composed the primary category of employees, at UW-Madison and
### Table 1. Listing of Attempts to Extend Collective Bargaining Rights to University of Wisconsin Faculty and Academic Staff and Relevant Campaign Variables

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Governor</th>
<th>State Senator</th>
<th>State Assembly</th>
<th>Faculty and Academic Staff Union Members</th>
<th>State Federation Officers</th>
<th>Field Staff</th>
<th>Employer Position</th>
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Source: State of Wisconsin Blue Book, legislative records, American Federation of Teachers records.

Note: MSN = UW-Madison; AFT = American Federation of Teachers; NEA = National Education Association; D = Democrat; R = Republican; O = oppose; N = neutral; N = no; Y = yes; ↑ = net gain in membership; ↔ = no change in membership; ↓ = net loss in membership.

Leadership switched midsession because of special elections.

Officers included AFT state federation president.
 Likewise, as the university increasingly relied on its employment of non-tenure-track faculty, it became commonplace for faculty unionists to regularly raise attention (e.g., through broadly distributed newsletters) to the inequities faced by contingent, de facto faculty members. In contrast to the common pattern outside of the UW System whereby tenure-track faculty and contingently employed faculty organize

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Source: University of Wisconsin System Fact Book (annual publication).
aData for 2008-9 have not yet been published.

UW-Milwaukee. Likewise, as the university increasingly relied on its employment of non-tenure-track faculty, it became commonplace for faculty unionists to regularly raise attention (e.g., through broadly distributed newsletters) to the inequities faced by contingent, de facto faculty members. In contrast to the common pattern outside of the UW System whereby tenure-track faculty and contingently employed faculty organize
through different vehicles, there were clearly shared interests in the campaign for collective bargaining rights that helped to unite people who were employed across job classifications.

The 1970s

Madison's Place in a Statewide System

Starting with the 1970s, the subject of collective bargaining rights for faculty and academic staff was frequently discussed; however, a more foundational policy question was also being answered that carried deep implications for the union’s campaign. Namely, UW—with its main campus in Madison and additional campuses in Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Parkside—was merged with the Wisconsin State University system in 1971 to form a singular UW System. In the wake of this merger, the new system included (1) a “flagship” research campus in Madison, (2) an urban doctoral campus in Milwaukee, and (3) a statewide extension “campus” with offices across the state along with (4) a set of eleven comprehensive or master-granting institutions (e.g., UW–Eau Claire) as well as (5) more than ten additional two-year campuses, which are now known as UW Colleges.

As Table 2 indicates, the UW System is very uneven when measured by the number of faculty and academic staff (e.g., research technicians) across campuses. UW-Madison, for example, has tended to employ approximately twenty times the number of faculty as UW-Superior. More systematically, Table 2 helps to illustrate that between 47 percent and 54 percent of all faculty and academic staff employed by the UW System have worked for UW-Madison in the past forty years.

The uniqueness of Madison in comparison with the rest of the system was always a variable for all parties to acknowledge during the campaign for collective bargaining rights. Beyond being the largest campus with the highest paid faculty, UW-Madison has also occupied a central symbolic role across the state. Newspapers, for example, regularly refer to UW-Madison as “the UW.” Likewise, when sports teams from the non-Madison campuses (e.g., UW-Milwaukee) compete against Madison, it is routine for the opposing team to recognize Madison as “UW” or “Wisconsin.”

Within the union, the merger of the original UW with the Wisconsin State University system is important partly because the AFT initiated its attempts to organize the Madison campus before it merged into the institution now known as the UW System. Consequently, AFT Local 223 was chartered on October 20, 1930 (Feinsinger and Roe 1971, 234), and continues through today, even though its original jurisdiction has changed in the wake of the system’s creation and even as a local formed in 1933 for UW-Extension (Local 253) and a local formed in 1919 for faculty in Milwaukee (Local 79) eventually failed to thrive (Dan Golodner, personal communication, March 26, 2010).

Outside of internal union politics, the UW System’s merger was also used as one of the administration’s shields against collective bargaining rights. During a meeting of
the system’s board of regents on May 11, 1973, for example, a position paper authored by “Central and Campus Administrations” concluded that “our advice at this time [about the impact of bargaining rights] would be without the benefit of operational experience under the terms of the new merger statute” (UW System 1973, 3).

**TAUWF’s National Affiliation**

Just as AFT Local 223 was organized in the 1930s as a union of faculty employed by the university in Madison, the faculty employed by the Wisconsin State University campuses started forming their own association beginning in 1915. Originally called the Association of Wisconsin State University Faculties, the group changed its name to the Association of University of Wisconsin Faculties (TAUWF) after the systems merged. Unlike Local 223, however, TAUWF and its predecessor had not been affiliated with any national or international labor union until action in the mid-1970s.

Presumably because of traditions that were established in advance of the statewide system’s creation, TAUWF never undertook any sustained action to organize the Madison campus, just as Local 223, which has tended to have small but active memberships between twenty and two hundred, never pursued serious organizing of the whole UW System. Among the reasons—beyond inertia—that these initial divisions remained after consolidation of the UW System are as follows: (1) Cultural differences between faculty and academic staff at the research-intensive UW-Madison existed in relation to faculty and academic staff at the teaching-intensive “out-state” or “satellite” campuses, (2) officers of each local would have needed to share a finite number of officer positions if they had merged with each other (thereby reducing the number of people eligible for higher-level positions within the union), and (3) cooperation among faculty and academic staff unionists in Madison and outside of Madison periodically reached limits when there would be conflicts on the question of whether UW-Madison faculty and academic staff needed special compensation funding as a function of their globally competitive research mission. Indeed, the persistent ambivalence that exists between parts of the UW System most recently illustrated itself in new administrative and gubernatorial proposals to carve out UW-Madison from the rest of the system (e.g., Ziff 2011a).

With its origins outside of Madison predating the UW System’s consolidation, TAUWF counted nearly 2,700 faculty as members in the early 1970s (as illustrated in Table 1), and undoubtedly, the organization was very attractive for national unions to welcome. Beyond its organization of thousands of faculty, the association was vibrant enough to sponsor several annual scholarship and business meetings that brought together faculty from campuses across the state for multiple days at a time. Indeed, at one of these events in 1962, TAUWF hosted U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas as its keynote speaker.

In spite of several ad hoc collaborations with the National Education Association (NEA) during the early 1970s, TAUWF’s “Committee of Five” published a report in 1975 that reviewed the benefits and risks of proposals for affiliation that were pending
with the NEA, the AFT, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and AFSCME. While it is remarkable that there were four formal proposals for the committee to consider, it voted four to one to recommend affiliation with AFT. Interestingly, AFSCME was the committee’s second preference, and there was a slight edge for AAUP’s proposal compared with the NEA.

To help account for the decision to choose AFT and cease collaborations with NEA, it is worth highlighting the committee’s lists of advantages and disadvantages for affiliating with the two major teachers’ organizations. About NEA, the committee lamented that it has “the most expensive dues,” “will give TAUWF only a very minor voice in state affairs,” and “made an indefinite financial commitment toward TAUWF affiliation.” About AFT, the committee’s primary rationale was that AFT “has considerable financial wherewithal and a clear, definite commitment to provide the necessary funds to consummate affiliation and the first collective bargaining contract.” It is also true that TAUWF’s move into AFT gave it 40 percent of the state federation’s voting strength at the time (Wisconsin Federation of Teachers 1975), whereas it would have held significantly smaller stakes in any of the other national unions’ state bodies.

TAUWF officially affiliated as Local 3535 on January 1, 1976. A TAUWF newsletter proclaiming the news quoted the local’s president as stating, “You can be sure that TAUWF will be back with its bill in the next session, and with the support of the AFT and the AFL-CIO will secure, at last, the means to have a positive voice for faculty in making the decisions critical to their professional lives” (Culver 1976). Indeed, AFT’s national office must have shared this level of confidence if only because the original affiliation agreement states that there will be significant quarterly grants to the local “until the signing of the first collective bargaining agreement” (TAUWF 1975, 2).

Part of the reason for this optimism relied on the fact that each of Wisconsin’s neighboring states adopted enabling legislation for faculty and professional staff during the mid-1970s (National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions 1988). Furthermore, as Table 1 indicates, unions expected opportunities for growth with Democrats in control of the state’s legislative chambers and the governor’s office. Even Milwaukee’s largest daily newspaper published a headline in 1975 that read “Faculty Union at UW Appears Likely,” with the first sentence specifying that “collective bargaining . . . is likely to become a reality soon in the University of Wisconsin System” (Olive 1975).

“WEAC Wars”

As Murphy (1992) reviews, Wisconsin was no exception to jurisdictional contests between the NEA and AFT for winning the right to represent teachers across the state. In fact, AFT staff who worked in the state during the 1970s describe a long series of contested elections and raids whereby one or the other organization was seeking to win affiliation from individual bargaining units as the “WEAC Wars,” in reference to the NEA’s state affiliate, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC).
In the midst of these conflicts between the AFT and NEA, the state’s NEA affiliate, with support from NEA’s national office, did not sit idly as AFT affiliates approached a victory that might have positioned them well for winning as many twelve thousand or more new members at the time. On the contrary, NEA organized varying numbers of faculty on several of the campuses (e.g., UW–Green Bay) and presented petitions for voluntary recognition to the board of regents from majorities of the faculty at UW-Oshkosh and UW–Green Bay (Krahn 1975). While the petitions for voluntary recognition were rejected, NEA attempted to “split the difference” by seeking legislation that would permit campus-by-campus bargaining units rather than larger, multicampus units that AFT endorsed at the time. While a campus-by-campus approach would have made it easier for NEA to organize some of the campuses since AFT already had a strong presence across the whole system, some in AFT viewed NEA’s alternative legislation as a divisive distraction to ensure that AFT did not have an opportunity to multiply its size by several times.

Legislatively, Table 1 indicates that there were three competing versions introduced for collective bargaining rights during the 1977-78 session, with Democrats in control of all three parts of the state government (governor, senate, and assembly). Those versions were respectively initiated by legislators on behalf of AFT, NEA, and the board of regents.

As the conflict between AFT and NEA continued and as the legislative efforts failed, each organization invested nontrivial amounts of energy attempting to place blame on the other. For example, WEAC published multiple newsletters for distribution through its campus contacts that attacked TAUWF for its decision to join AFT and itemized “how ‘democracy’ works in the AFT” with its “one man governance,” explicitly and critically referring to the AFT president Al Shanker (UW–River Falls Education Association 1977). Similarly, although with less animosity attacking the NEA, TAUWF charged that one of several reasons for the failure to win bargaining rights involved “tactics of delay and destroy adopted by [NEA] whose leaders in Madison clearly did not want a bill” (TAUWF 1978).

During the same period that there were conflicts between the NEA and AFT/AFL-CIO, it is also noteworthy that the National Right to Work Committee, based in Arlington, Virginia, published an “actiongram” to its members in the state on October 15, 1979, to attack legislation enabling collective bargaining as a “scheme,” “power grab,” and “take over” of “Wisconsin higher education” (Larson 1979).

The 1980s

“Madison Liberals”

Into the 1980s, there was still optimism within the union that enabling legislation could be advanced; however, direct conflicts with NEA were overshadowed by direct conflicts with Madison-area legislators opposed to collective bargaining rights. For example, during the 1981-82 legislative session, AB 452/SB 636 was set for
consideration by the full assembly before losing, forty-nine to forty-six, on a floor vote. The assembly’s majority leader at the time—later appointed by President Clinton as ambassador to Norway—told reporters that “it cannot be proved that this bill would improve the quality of higher education in this state” (Fanlund 1982).

In response to these divisions among the Democrats, the state AFL-CIO president told reporters that “I don’t think we need fair-weather friends. . . . If they don’t support us at a time when we need them, c’est la guerre” (Shively 1982). As part of a failed effort to win a new floor vote, the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO (1982) also published a newsletter whose top story identified the “sixteen Democrats” who voted “WRONG” along with the four Republicans and forty-two Democrats who voted to extend bargaining rights.

During the 1983-84 legislative session, with Democrats back in control of state government, the senate bill (SB 174) reached a vote on the floor that lost seventeen to fourteen, with several Madison-area liberals, including future three-term U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, voting against the bill. In the assembly, there were three public hearings on the same proposal (AB 282) but no floor vote.

During the 1985-86 legislative session, with Democrats still in control of state government, AB 229—with fifteen amendments from the floor—passed sixty-six to thirty-two in the state assembly and twenty-four to eight in the state senate. Despite this apparent passage by both legislative chambers, the legislation failed to receive a final procedural vote by the assembly, which continued to be led by the Madison-area legislator (Tom Loftus) who was later appointed as Clinton’s ambassador to Norway.

With all of these close votes, it should not be surprising that there was some public infighting among Democratic politicians during the years when their party was in charge. For example, a Democratic state representative from La Crosse publicly criticized a peer in Madison for advancing an “elitist” argument against enabling legislation (Pommer 1983). Likewise, even the governor, Tony Earl (D), publicly chastised the UW-Madison faculty senate during one of its meetings for its “obsession” against collective bargaining rights (Knoche 1984). In fact, Earl lamented that he saw “more passion, more energy” from Madison faculty opposed to collective bargaining rights than on any other topic (e.g., increased support for public higher education). Despite this heavy rhetoric and despite his personal support for enabling legislation, Earl was not known to have actively pressed any legislators to follow suit (Friederich 1984). Likewise, the publicly stated concerns of UW-Madison faculty members that collective bargaining rights would undermine their unique “flagship” status in the UW System continued to persist.

Two main explanations that have been offered for the liberal Democrats’ historical opposition to these proposals involved (1) allegiances to NEA and (2) ties to the UW-Madison faculty senate. With regard to NEA, the state’s primary teachers’ association was opposed to enabling legislation that would have favored the statewide organization that AFT enjoyed through its affiliation of TAUWF, Local 3535; consequently, given that AFT in Wisconsin was significantly smaller than NEA at the time, it is clear
that NEA positions held important sway with Democratic legislators. With regard to the UW-Madison faculty senate, the common concern that explained its original opposition to enabling legislation involved a preoccupation that it would maintain independence and freedom from any constraints that collective bargaining could establish. While UW System administration opposed bargaining rights for different reasons, the UW-Madison faculty senate’s historic opposition provided a degree of legitimacy for legislators from any part of the state to oppose earlier bills.

With regard to direct impact and lobbying by the UW-Madison faculty senate, it is worthwhile to consider the illustrative case of an election in 1984. Specifically, when the state representative position that serves most of the campus and many of the faculty opened in 1984 for a contested race (with no incumbent), the final runoff involved a traditional Democratic candidate who supported collective bargaining rights for the faculty and academic staff and an alternate candidate who opposed such rights. While the traditional Democratic candidate ultimately won and stayed in office through 2009, voting for enabling legislation when given the chance, a group of former chairs of the UW-Madison faculty senate’s executive committee organized public support as “Independents” in support of the alternate candidate because the traditional Democratic candidate supported collective bargaining rights for faculty and academic staff (Isthmus 2004). This case is illustrative of direct connections between the UW-Madison faculty senate and the state legislature; however, the failure to elect someone opposed to collective bargaining rights also illustrates that more powerful groups, such as the Madison-area AFL-CIO, were able to win that election in 1984.

Interestingly, Madison-area legislators who supported legislation enabling collective bargaining for graduate student employees in 1985 (Van Ells 1999) were among those who opposed similar proposals for faculty and academic staff. With lower stakes (with fewer people affected) and without the close interest of NEA, since it lacked a history of representing graduate employees, there are clear differences between enabling legislation for graduate employees, on the one hand, and doing so for faculty and academic staff, on the other. Among the politicians in this category, it is notable that when they chose to pursue statewide elections, they typically brought their position on the subject of collective bargaining rights into alignment with the AFL-CIO. Feingold, for example, has reportedly expressed regret for his historical opposition to faculty and academic staff collective bargaining rights on numerous occasions when seeking AFT support for his U.S. Senate campaigns (Raymond Spoto, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Independent of differences that existed among Democratic legislators and the various reasons for those differences, Table 1 is clear to show that there was an increase in staffing support for faculty and academic staff organizing during a period in the 1980s when Democrats controlled both houses of the state legislature as well as the governor’s office. While AFT’s state federation provided at least one field staff member exclusively for Locals 3535 and 223 ever since TAUWF affiliated in 1976, Table 1 reflects the fact that AFT’s national body invested at least one of its field staff
members for important periods during the late 1970s and 1980s when there were clear opportunities to win this significant change to state labor law.

The focus on Democratic infighting with regard to collective bargaining rights ceased to be the primary barrier for the campaign, however, when Republican Tommy Thompson won election as governor in November 1986 and assumed office in January 1987. During Thompson’s first year as the state’s executive officer, the 1987-88 legislative session included AB 24—the twenty-fourth bill introduced that session—as yet another effort to extend bargaining rights to faculty and academic staff employed across the UW System. For AB 24, the legislation passed both houses of the Democratic-controlled legislature by margins of sixty-six to thirty-two in the assembly and twenty-three to nine in the senate; however, a motion to override Governor Thompson’s veto failed by one vote (sixty-five to thirty-four) after one of the initial Republican supporters switched his vote.

**Focus on Academic Staff**

Conflict between the AFT and NEA took a twist during the 1980s because the NEA started in 1981 with legislation (AB 510/SB 395) that would have extended collective bargaining rights to academic staff— and not faculty. While the AFT eventually accepted this move during the 1990s, the NEA strategy was initially seen as an unacceptable and unnecessary compromise to leave faculty on the sidelines.

In 1981, for example, when AFT was still campaigning for bargaining rights for faculty and academic staff—with a Republican as governor—WEAC’s bid for legislation that would focus exclusively on academic staff continued the conflicts that boiled in the late 1970s. Newspaper accounts of the conflict acknowledged claims that there was “an out-and-out turf battle” under way between AFT and NEA (Browne 1981). In fact, TAUWF’s director charged that WEAC’s bill for academic staff was a “stalking horse to kill our bill” for academic staff and faculty (Browne 1981).

While legislative efforts to gain bargaining rights for academic staff did win support in one house of the legislature during the 1989-90 session, and won support of both legislative chambers during the 1991-92 biennium before being vetoed by the governor, it is noteworthy that academic staff were extended statutorily defined “shared governance” rights during the mid-1980s, undoubtedly in response to the pursuit of bargaining rights by the AFT and NEA.

Outside of legislative efforts, it is also notable that NEA did invest some energy during the 1980s to welcome academic staff as WEAC members to gain a foothold for any future organizing, including any future jurisdictional contests with AFT. Efforts to enfranchise academic staff within WEAC were not sustained and were not ultimately successful; instead, most academic staff who joined WEAC when it focused on academic staff eventually left the membership rolls (e.g., due to retirement). WEAC’s (2007) website illustrates the foothold approach with its public identification of “10 academic staff employees in the University of Wisconsin System” as part of it ninety-eight-thousand-member organization, according to counts from 2007.
Internal to the AFT, it is similarly interesting that in 1987, TAUWF Local 3535 changed its name to TAUWP so that Faculty was replaced by the more inclusive Professionals. And 1987 is the first instance in which there is a record of AFT Local 223 using the name United Faculty and Academic Staff, after earlier merging with a previously independent organization named United Faculty in 1974. While competition between AFT and NEA posed a barrier to the passage of enabling legislation at points during the late 1970s and 1980s, the expansion of AFT’s interests—and local names—during the 1980s reflects changes in the demography of the faculty and academic staff populations (see Table 2); however, it also seems justified to credit competition between AFT and NEA as another reason for this expansion of scope and deeper engagement of academic staff by AFT.

**Acting Like a Union**

After Tommy Thompson’s election as governor, the Union continued its efforts to flip the board of regents from opponent to supporter of collective bargaining rights. Previously, during the 1974-75 period, for example, the regents publicly and actively engaged the question of collective bargaining rights for faculty and academic staff and even published a detailed, fifty-four-page report on the subject that was later packaged as a bound volume by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The regents were never, however, aligned with either AFT or NEA on the specifics of a mutually agreeable framework for collective bargaining rights.

Throughout the 1980s, the topic again took center stage. For example, the UW System’s board welcomed presentations in 1986 from the president of AFT’s local of faculty employed by the City University of New York as well as the director of a national higher education labor-management center (Muzik 1986). Following this discussion, the regents voted eight to six to continue opposing the right to decide; however, Local 3535’s newsletter trumpeted that “the vote was closer than ever before” (Muzik 1986).

As regular participants in policy discussions relating to faculty and academic staff interests, officers of Local 3535, in particular, maintained a consistent and visible presence throughout the duration of this case study vis-à-vis the board of regents and the top-ranked officers of UW System administration. In fact, a review of Locals 3535 and 223 newsletters of the past four decades indicates a consistent focus on operating as a public advocate for faculty and academic staff. Beyond organizing pressure on the administration and regents to seek greater public support for the university’s programs and people, Locals 3535 and 223 also maintained strong programs of representing individual faculty and academic staff in their appeals of unwelcome treatment. For example, while there was no contractually defined grievance procedure, local representatives nonetheless served as member-advocates for faculty and academic staff who sought redress through appeals processes that were outlined through campus-specific policies and procedures. In addition, and with AFT’s active support, Locals 3535 and 223 also invested significant sums into litigation that challenged
discriminatory employment practices that affected everyone in the potential bargaining units (i.e., not simply people who were dues-paying members).

As with other periods of time during the campaign, Locals 3535 and 223 strived to operate in as many ways as a union with collective bargaining would operate. For example, regular membership meetings were convened as fora to discuss and initiate member-led programs (e.g., public evaluations of administrative performance). Outreach to prospective members sought to engage people on the basis of campus concerns (e.g., surveying faculty and academic staff for their views about compensation and fringe benefits, such as campus child care options). Additionally, members of the locals often participated as delegates and, sometimes, officers of central labor councils in their regions. Consequently, there were opportunities for mutual aid and coalition building. For example, the graduate employee unions for UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee teaching assistants, which are also affiliated with AFT and form their own independent council within the state federation, regularly supported and facilitated faculty and academic staff organizing on their campuses (e.g., providing parts of their office space for clerical work, for meetings, and for phone banking).

With specific regard to coalition work undertaken in collaboration with other unions as part of campus-based coalitions and/or the broader AFL-CIO, a common focus involved active engagement of elected officials and political candidates. Even as minority unions, it is noteworthy that Local 3535 maintained its own political action committee for statewide elections for most of its existence and regularly conducted its own interviewing process of candidates for governor and other high-profile offices. Regular participation in the electoral process (e.g., hosting union-sponsored “coffee” meetings on campus with elected officials) provided Local 3535 with particular cachet inside the state capitol. Indeed, with its broad geographical coverage, Local 3535 was able to engage members who lived in a majority of legislators’ districts, in contrast with UW-Madison faculty and academic staff, who were constituents of a small minority of state legislators (from the Madison area).

The 1990s

Plodding and Planning

Early in 1990, the campaign for bargaining rights took a novel logistical path when the assembly’s majority leader included a proposal for enabling legislation as part of a budget-repair bill (SB 542) that was adopted in the middle of a biennial budget. While Governor Thompson vetoed this provision out of the budget, it opened a new avenue for winning legislative change that is less subject to some of the procedural wranglings that blocked previous legislative efforts.

In 1992, in a familiar story, SB 262 was approved by both houses of the state legislature but then vetoed by the governor. The interesting twist to this development is that Thompson reportedly rationalized his veto “because academic staff have ‘shared governance’ rights similar to faculty” (McDade 1992). The irony of Thompson’s
position in 1992 is that academic staff had gained shared-governance rights as an intermediate response to earlier efforts to win enabling legislation; and so, it is clear that Thompson and others intended statutorily established shared governance to be a compromise.

While additional legislative efforts were initiated throughout other parts of the 1990s, the bills did not reach any remarkable endpoints, with Republicans typically in control of most or all of the state’s three wings of government. During this time, however, Locals 3535 and 223 collaborated with each other to develop a broader strategic approach that would engage constituencies (e.g., students) that had not traditionally been sought for support. The locals also prioritized agenda topics, such as campaigning for a state budget that supported public higher education and other public goods. As with other campaigns, these efforts were pursued as part of coalitions with other campus organizations (e.g., graduate employee unions in Madison and Milwaukee) and statewide public interest organizations that were focused on access to public higher education.

In the latter 1990s, it is noteworthy that Local 223’s president won election to the state federation’s executive board and, because of his background as a union leader in other states, he posed a credible threat to the reelection of the incumbent state federation president. Not coincidentally, this new internal tension between the local and the state federation yielded a doubling (i.e., from one to two) of the field staff provided for organizing the UW System. Along with the sizable voting bloc that Local 3535 regularly presented at state federation conventions, it is clear that these kinds of tensions were critical to winning renewed attention and support for the campaign for bargaining rights.

Outside of the AFT, an important internal development that occurred in the 1990s is that the state affiliates of AFT and NEA signed an “interaction agreement” that entailed commitments to keep peace between the two organizations. As part of this agreement, in fact, NEA ceded jurisdiction for future organizing within the UW System to the AFT amid preliminary discussions of a merger between the two state affiliates.

The 2000s

Comprehensive Campaign for Bargaining Rights

Into the 2000s, with Republicans still in control of most of state government, Locals 3535 and 223 focused on winning support from faculty senates across the UW System, and they gained favorable resolutions in support of collective bargaining rights from each of the campuses outside of Madison between March 2001 and March 2002. Madison’s senate, instead, relied on the input of a highly regarded law professor who itemized seven specific concerns that she, and later, the senate, identified as necessary conditions for supporting enabling legislation.
It is remarkable that during the 2003-4 legislative session, there was no legislative attempt to win bargaining rights. It was also the first period since the late 1970s when there was a net increase in the number of faculty and academic staff members of AFT across the state. In fact, during this period, there were concerted efforts to draft legislation that incorporated each of the Madison senate’s concerns, and there were expanded efforts on the campuses to organize faculty and academic staff on the basis of locally important issues, such as wages, health insurance benefits, retirement benefits, and job security, to name a few. As an illustration of the growing resources that were being committed during this period, AFT’s state federation published a series of news releases on topics such as salary as well as the selection of a new UW System president, the proposed elimination of an outreach program at UW-Platteville, a case alleging age discrimination at UW-Oshkosh, and AFT-sponsored litigation relating to tenure.

After there was time for new, Madison-acceptable legislation to be drafted, and after there was an intentional hiatus on the legislative front, members of Locals 3535 and 223 started organizing on the campuses to learn more about the “past, present, and prospects” for bargaining rights and to build pressure on their local legislators to win support for the effort. These efforts gained a fresh focus during the 2005-6 legislative session, when members pressured the Republican state senate majority leader to introduce SB 452 and testify on its behalf. In fact, at the January 2006 hearing for this bill, the state senate’s Republican leader argued that “if we are going to bring the best and brightest here and keep them, they need to know that not only are the salaries good but that they are going to be treated thoughtfully and carefully” (Foley 2006). At the same hearing, the Governor’s Office of State Employment Relations testified in favor of bargaining rights, citing Wisconsin’s “fine tradition” of supporting the rights of public sector employees (Timberlake 2006). Additionally, the United Council of UW Students presented a copy of a resolution it adopted in December 2005 that supported collective bargaining rights, and the UW System administration formally registered a position of neutrality on the legislation. Just as notably, the UW-Madison faculty senate did not register opposition to the legislation for the first time in history.

While SB 452 did not make it past a committee hearing, it provided a new legitimacy for the campaign partly because there were Republican legislators—responding to union-organized pressure from their constituents—at the front of the legislation. The committee hearing, for example, attracted more than twenty members of Locals 3535 and 223 from across the state to spend a day in the Capitol and five faculty and academic staff members who were constituents of the senate committee testified. In addition to being featured on the front page of AFT’s statewide membership newsletter, the campaign also gained attention from AFT’s national higher education periodical.

During the 2007-8 legislative session, the Democratic governor used the “bully pulpit” of the biennial state budget to include a proposal for collective bargaining rights. And while this proposal was ultimately removed from the budget by legislators as a “policy item,” the proposal provided the union with additional legitimacy and a new target for organizing more support. For example, it was through this target that
the union gained editorial support from newspapers across the state, including the largest daily outlet, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (2007). While the Milwaukee newspaper is not regarded as especially ideological, it opened its editorial with the observation that “the right to organize is a basic one that, having already been allowed even for police officers, cannot be reasonably denied to select other public employees in Wisconsin.” In other words, the pressure campaign helped people wonder, “Why don’t faculty and staff have this right?” rather than “Why should they have this right?”

Within months of the 2007 budget resolution that left out bargaining rights, legislation (SB 353) was introduced that provided yet another set of opportunities for the union to build pressure and expose those who were blocking the legislation’s passage. For example, a press conference to launch SB 353 was organized in December 2007 on the UW–Green Bay campus and drew approximately one hundred people along with news reporters. Later in December 2007, a state senate committee took testimony at a public hearing at UW–Eau Claire, where twenty-one faculty, staff, and students from eight different UW campuses advocated for collective bargaining rights (Lindquist 2007).

With Democrats in control of the state senate during the 2007-8 session, SB 353 prevailed with bipartisan support by a margin of 21 to 12. Despite numerous organized efforts, however, the Republican-controlled state assembly failed to provide a committee hearing, let alone a floor vote, on the legislation. While some Democratic legislators expressed a mix of dissatisfaction and confusion that AFT members were working to win Republican support for collective bargaining rights, the union’s strategy was to engage members in specific areas across the state so that (1) the Republican legislators would have significant incentive to support enabling legislation or (2) those legislators who opposed this change in the state’s labor law would be forced to register their opposition publicly, in advance of the November 2008 elections.

As indicated in Table 1, the goals of this strategy certainly match with the patterns that were established through the November 2008 elections since Democrats regained control of the state’s three wings of government starting in January 2009. Of course, anyone familiar with the history recounted in this review knows that Democratic control did not automatically imply passage of this change in state law, and so AFT members, as in 2007, rallied to win action by the governor and legislature to adopt enabling legislation as part of the 2009 state budget process. This near-term goal, which was based on decades of organizational focus and years of growing momentum, was met in June 2009 when the governor signed a budget that included bargaining rights for approximately eighteen thousand faculty and academic staff across the UW System.

**A Successful, Accidental Nonmajority Union**

One reason this case is interesting is that it is clear in the case of Local 3535, with its two thousand members in the early 1970s, that the national union expected to win collective bargaining rights within approximately one year of affiliating the independent organization. Just as clearly, however, the local remained active within the national
union—without collective bargaining rights—for close to thirty-five years before this goal was reached. The miscalculation, by both the local and the national union, that informed the affiliation is interesting in light of Nissen’s (2001) description of two kinds of minority unions.

At the origin of its affiliation, it is clear that Local 3535 was expected to be a “holding organization” (Nissen 2001, 42) that would function as an enhanced organizing committee that would be able to pursue traditional representation elections within approximately one year. Because collective bargaining rights were not won, however, within the window that was originally imagined, Local 3535—unintentionally—ended up on the “longer-term time horizon” track, “agitating for the workers’ cause when no election is foreseeable in the near future” (Nissen 2001, 42). As for how such a longer-term minority union persists, Nissen notes that the length of its existence would depend on “circumstances.”

Among those who have studied the experience of nonmajority unions, Nack and Tarlau (2005) acknowledge that there are active debates within the national unions concerning whether it is advisable to continue investing time, energy, and resources into projects whose rewards are likely to be less definitive than more traditional organizing efforts. The cases of Locals 3535 and 223, however, demonstrate that when minority unions are fully enfranchised members of a state and national union, they are capable of winning consistent levels of support from the state and national union. Indeed, while Nissen (2001, 50) also expresses concern that national or international unions be committed for “the long haul” when organizing minority unions, it is clear from the experiences of Local 3535 and 223 that full membership—in a union whose state federation permitted regular participation in statewide leadership roles—was a critical circumstance for the minority union’s persistence and the successful acquisition of collective bargaining rights.

Another important circumstance that permitted Locals 3535 and 223 to succeed involves the fact that AFT’s decision-making power is largely diffused through state federations. For example, AFT state federations commonly serve as clearinghouses for professional staff who are assigned to support specific locals. Because of this relatively decentralized structure, members of Locals 3535 and 223 were able to participate in high-profile leadership roles of the state federation even without collective bargaining rights. As Table 1 indicates, members of these locals were consistently part of the state federation’s executive board, and two members were successively elected president of the state federation in 2005 and 2007, prior to the state’s adoption of enabling legislation for UW System faculty and academic staff.

To help consider this case study in light of comparable experiences elsewhere, it is worth noting that the vocabulary that researchers and practitioners are using to describe organizations like Locals 3535 and 223 is far from consistent. For example, the two locals could arguably have been defined as unions that were “open source” (Freeman and Rogers 2002), “minority” (e.g., Nissen 2001), “nonmajority” (e.g., Summers 1990), or “nonbargaining” (McKenna 2009). While Nack and Tarlau (2005) have suggested that some of these terms are unnecessary or at least overused, it is clear that
future research should focus on systematically resolving some of this “terminological problem” (Mironi 2010). It is just as clear that there is not a consistent taxonomy partly because “there is very little academic literature on minority unions” (Nissen 2001, 36).

In spite of the different semantics that are used to describe unions like Locals 3535 and 223, advocates of nonmajority unions tend to presume (1) that members will pay reduced dues and (2) that it costs less to support such unions. For example, Summers (1990, 547) assumes that “the cost of supporting union activities where the union lacks a majority is substantial, though less than when there is a an established bargaining relationship with a collective agreement and a grievance procedure with arbitration.” In the same paragraph, however, Summers acknowledges that “there has been no effort, to my knowledge, to determine the level of dues necessary to support such activities by non-majority unions” (p. 547). To apply these arguments to the Wisconsin case, it is notable that (1) faculty and academic staff union members were paying full dues, which tended to be approximately 1 percent of salary, and (2) the campaign still required regular, and sometimes heavy, subsidies from AFT’s state federation, at least, during most of its duration. In this sense, it conceivably costs more to support an active, worthwhile nonmajority union compared with a mature, traditional union; however, if members are fully enfranchised and paying full dues, then any subsidies from the state or national affiliates will need to be less than they would be otherwise.

**Organizing to Organize**

While the Wisconsin case presents a successful outcome of minority unionism as a path toward a change in labor law, union advocates in the private sector who are constrained by federal labor law have recently adopted the goal of winning employer-specific neutrality agreements to enable new organizing campaigns. Given that workers are significantly more likely to unionize for collective bargaining when there are preexisting neutrality or “card check” agreements (Eaton and Kriesky 2001), it makes sense to seek changes that would level the playing field before committing significant resources. Indeed, a growing number of studies describe the ways in which unions for hotel companies (Hurd 2008), grocery distribution centers (Lund and Wright 2003), and steel manufacturing (Eaton and Rubenstein 2006) have sought neutrality for organizing.

In his review of the various ways in which unions pursue organizing with neutrality agreements, Hurd (2008, 39) outlines “two broad categories of neutrality agreements: those that are the product of collective bargaining and those that are negotiated as stand-alone agreements with no connection to existing collective bargaining relationships.” In more detail, Hurd describes the approach of many unions, including UNITE HERE and Service Employees International Union, to win neutrality agreements through collective bargaining for organizing unorganized workplaces managed by the same employer. Through this “bargaining to organize” (Hurd 2008, 37) approach, which might include making participation in joint labor-management initiatives
contingent on a neutrality agreement (Eaton and Rubenstein 2006), unions use the leverage of their current organization to level the field for growth. In the other kind of campaign for neutrality agreements, where there is no preexisting collective bargaining agreement, Hurd acknowledges that there are critics who charge that the achievement of neutrality agreements through top-down means—"typically controlled by national union leaders and staff" (Hurd 2008, 41)—can yield outcomes that conflict with effective unionism.

In this context, the experiences of Locals 3535 and 223 suggest that the "playing field," whether it involves an employer-specific neutrality agreement or state-specific labor law, can also be modified through a third kind of approach that relies on worksite organizing that is led by people who are fully enfranchised as union members—and potential officers. While there are certainly limitations to this "organizing-to-organize" approach, perhaps especially in the private sector (e.g., Feuille 1991), the case study in this article demonstrates a successful example in which the union’s internal political structure lent itself to this outcome. More specifically, rather than rely on the discretion of decision makers within the union but outside of the potential bargaining unit, it was active and energetic leveraging by the locals within the state federation, primarily, that kept the campaign moving.

Among the limitations of this case study, it is outside of the scope of this analysis to consider the successful outcome of representation elections for collective bargaining on numerous campuses through early 2011 (e.g., Ziff 2011b), and in the absence of any first contract, it is not possible the consider the possible influence in this case of the organizing-to-organize, minority union path to the bargaining table (e.g., Jordan and Bruno 2005). Of course, the unique events precipitated by proposals in early 2011 to eliminate collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin and cut funding for the public sector would make it difficult to generalize the impact of organizing approaches on any first contracts in this case; however, it is certainly a topic for future research to consider the bridge between minority unionism and first contracts.

The generalizable aspects of the organizing-to-organize model that members of AFT led in the Wisconsin case hinge largely on a diffuse structure of power whereby there were opportunities for rank-and-file members to leverage decision-making power within the union in relation to the union’s statewide officers. Beyond accepting the idea that tension between a local and its larger affiliates can ultimately be productive and healthy in at least some situations, the case study highlights the benefit of enlightened leadership and/or enlightened planning whereby power in an organization is broadly shared. In this case, there is certainly evidence of a combination, across approximately forty years, of enlightened leadership and enlightened planning. The combination makes sense, since enlightened leaders who establish organizational policies (e.g., for power sharing) are able to instill their views into the organization’s structure past the specific time they serve in office. Power sharing, in this case, originated with the full enfranchisement of members and continued with a constitution that ensured representation on the state federation board, which, within AFT, provided access to important levers for organizational resources (in the form of staffing and
funding). Outside of leadership dynamics, it is noteworthy that the state federation’s delegate convention participates directly in this power-sharing structure since the convention delegates from locals across the state are the members who maintain and periodically revise the constitution.

**Conclusion**

The case study of this long-haul campaign by faculty and academic staff members across the UW System is interesting in light of growing momentum on colleges and universities for unionization by tenure-track faculty (Holsinger 2008), non-tenure-track faculty (Dobbie and Robinson 2008), graduate employees (Herman and Schmid 2003; Lafer 2003), and classified staff (Albright 2008). Indeed, the relevance of unionization has become a mainstream point of analysis for any consideration of how contemporary colleges and universities are governed (e.g., Ehrenberg et al. 2004), as evidenced partly by the *Wall Street Journal’s* (2009) decision to editorialize in protest of Wisconsin’s adoption of enabling legislation for faculty and academic staff. The case study presented in this article is also helpful, however, for the generalizable lessons and real-world data that it provides, especially given the relative lack of attention that minority unions have received to date.

Among the generalizable lessons, it is clear that two necessary components of the campaign for bargaining rights in Wisconsin were (1) the full enfranchisement of members through Locals 3535 and 223 and (2) the relatively diffuse distribution of internal governance within the national union. In either case, it is clear that if faculty and academic staff members did not have the leverage that they were able to exercise through internal AFT governance channels, then the campaign for bargaining rights would have easily been replaced by other organizational goals. Likewise, if the AFT state federation did not have the ability to assign significant staffing resources to the two locals and, instead, the decisions were left in the hands of regional or national governing bodies, then the two locals would have held no leverage to extract significant and sustained commitments.

Two implications of the case study relate to (1) the importance of nonmajority unions and (2) the ways in which unions seek to level the playing field for organizing new members. In this context, it is interesting that Locals 3535 and 223 successfully led the campaign for bargaining rights by “returning to [the] roots” (Morris 2004, 11) of organizing a workplace independent of any near-term prospect for exclusive representation through collective bargaining. Indeed, while it was routine for international unions to charter locals during the 1930s, for example, that had no immediate chance of proceeding to a representation election (e.g., Kugler 1968), that practice does not presently prevail as the dominant model for organizing. While there are certainly limitations to the applicability of this case study as a model (e.g., within international unions where power is not broadly diffused), the case should help to provoke more consideration of this kind of approach to organizing new workplaces. In fact, the case provides a result for the kind of experimentation with minority unions that Hurd and
Pinnock (2004, 213) predicted might have some of “greatest potential for creativity” and Chaison (2006, 425) outlined as part of the “path to revival.” In the context of actions that unfolded in early 2011 in several midwestern states, it is clear that more research concerning the effectiveness of minority unions will become especially valuable as unions navigate new terrains where public-sector collective bargaining rights have been eliminated or significantly eroded.

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